

Deer in Northwest Austin - Observations and Recommendations

Presented by DeerAustin to the Austin City Council, Public Health and Human Services Committee, 3/20/12

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Observations on Information Presented to the Committee on February 21, 2012:

1. *Deer involved collisions are down*

City of Austin Deer Involved Collision Reports (by year and zip code)

2009	78731 – 7	City wide – 52
2010	78731 – 10	City wide – 63
2011	78731 – 4	City wide – 37

2. *Dead Deer Pick-up Reports are down in 78731 and stable city wide*

City of Austin Dead Deer Pick-up Reports (by year and zip code)*

2009	78731 – 202	City wide – 607
2010	78731 – 168	City wide – 517
2011	78731 – 121	City wide – 559

* *Collisions and pick ups are down despite other contributing factors, including publication of 311 for pick up, increased traffic, and speeding*

3. *There are few complaints about feeding*

Current City Statistics: IFODO Complaint/Enforcement Report

2009	32 complaints regarding 18 addresses city wide
2010	20 complaints regarding 12 addresses city wide
2011	23 complaints regarding 16 addresses city wide

There have been only 6 citations, resulting in 4 dismissals, 1 deferral, and 1 fine.

4. *NWACA does not speak for the neighborhood or the city*

NWACA Statistics

- “About 500” households out of 5000 in the NWACA boundaries are members
- 198 households voted in 2010 to “reduce the deer population by the most humane method possible”
- “Over the last 5 years, [the] NWACA Wildlife Committee focused on deer management”
- According to NWACA, the “No Feeding Ordinance is Ineffective”

City of Austin Initiatives

March 2007	City Council resolved to obtain National Wildlife Federation community level certification
March 2009	City of Austin recognized as a certified wildlife habitat community, promoting the use of native plants and landscaping to develop natural habitats that attract wildlife and birds
March 2012	The City of Austin has over 1,700 certified wildlife habitats and counting

Summary observations:

Deer “issues” are not increasing and few complain;

Fewer than 4% of the households in the NWACA boundaries and less than ½ of the NWACA membership voted to reduce the deer population, despite a five year effort to solicit negative opinions and data regarding the deer in Northwest Austin; and

NWACA’s recommendations to amend the No Feeding Ordinance conflict with established city policy.

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Recommendations to the Committee, March 20, 2012:

1. Make no changes to the existing No Feeding Ordinance

There are more than 1,700 certified wildlife habitats in Austin, and that number is growing due to city-sponsored promotional campaigns. Prohibiting water conflicts with that initiative.

Prohibiting water would make any urn, rain barrel, fountain, birdbath, kiddie pool or pond in the city a potential violation of the ordinance, subject to a fine.

Deleting the intent requirement would outlaw some composting and impact feral cat programs.

Changing "may" to "shall" eliminates city officials' necessary discretion, strains resources and potentially places city employees in unsafe situations.

Increasing the fine may make it less likely that citizens will be fined because it appears that the court is reluctant to assess fines already.

If a citizen does not think the No-Feeding Ordinance is being adequately enforced by the city, there is relief in the law now: the citizen may file a written complaint in Municipal Court.

2. Focus city efforts on existing health and safety laws, including the Community Education component of the No Feeding Ordinance

- **Community Education**

The goal of the ordinance should not be to increase the number of citations but to implement the education component of the No Feeding Ordinance through a positive campaign that promotes safety and awareness.

Use established city communication outlets for education. Create slogans, collateral and signage. Involve representatives from HHS, Public Safety, APD and PARD. Neighborhood distribution channels are limited; the city can use the city deer portal, the city utility bill web site and other frequently visited city web sites as well as media and social networking outlets for the education required by the ordinance.

Timely, targeted and fact-based education is needed. For example, deer fawning season in central Texas is April through June. To be effective, March is the time to get the word out to leave fawns alone to keep people and deer safe during fawning season.

Include education on effective use of deer repellents and fencing for people who do not like deer.

- **Off leash dogs**

Unrestrained dogs are a common sight in Northwest Austin. Off leash dogs are a primary cause of deer conflicts. Dogs are particularly threatening to does with fawns.

- **Speeding in the neighborhood**

During 2010, the NWACA Transportation Committee asked APD for speed studies, which were conducted on four streets in Northwest Hills. According to the study:

36% of drivers were speeding on Burney Drive; top speed was 60mph in a 30mph zone

43% of drivers were speeding on Far West Blvd; top speed was 58mph in a 30mph zone

46% of drivers were speeding on Greystone Drive; top speed was 50mph in a 30mph zone

74% of drivers were speeding on Mesa Drive; top speed was 54mph in a 30mph zone

3. Establish a city process to coordinate stakeholder interests

Create a deer-related listserve to keep neighbors informed. At city-sponsored deer forums in 2010, more than 130 residents attended and submitted contact information to city staff in order to be notified of developments regarding the deer; however, no communications have been received.

Refer issues for adequate stakeholder input and review prior to bringing them to council. The Austin Animal Advisory Commission is one possible resource for coordinating this effort. Consider clarification of an official city position regarding deer in Austin.